Earliest baboon found at Malapa

August 19, 2015 in Other Sciences / Archaeology & Fossils

A team from Wits University's Evolutionary Studies Institute has discovered a fossil monkey specimen representing the earliest baboon ever found.

Dating back more than 2 million years ago (between 2.026-2.36 million years ago), the partial skull was found at Malapa, in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, the same site where the partial skeletons of the new early hominin species, Australopithecus sediba, were discovered in 2010.

"Baboons are known to have co-existed with hominins at several fossil localities in East Africa and South Africa and they are sometimes even used as comparative models in human evolution," says Dr. Christopher Gilbert (Hunter College, CUNY), lead author of the study.
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The skull, found during excavations for *A. sediba*, confirms earlier suggestions that the fossil baboon species to which it belongs, *Papio angusticeps*, was in fact closely related to modern baboons, and quite possibly the earliest known members of the modern baboon species *Papio hamadryas*.

Modern baboons (genus *Papio*) are typically divided into a number of populations recognised as either species or subspecies spread all throughout sub-Saharan Africa and into the Arabian Peninsula. Despite their evolutionary success, modern baboon origins in the fossil record have not well-understood or agreed upon.

"According to molecular clock studies, baboons are estimated to have diverged from their closest relatives by ~1.8 to 2.2 million years ago; however, until now, most fossil specimens known within this time range have been either too fragmentary to be definitive or too primitive to be confirmed as members of the living species *Papio hamadryas*," says Gilbert.
CT scans show UW 88-866 in oblique (left) and lateral (right) views. Credit: Wits University

"The specimen from Malapa and our current analyses help to confirm the suggestion of previous researchers that *P. angusticeps* may, in fact, be an early population of *P. hamadryas.*"

Analyses of the specimen at Malapa, and the group of fossil specimens traditionally placed in the fossil species *P. angusticeps*, suggest that *P. angusticeps* displays anatomy that is consistent with modern baboon populations.

A comparison of morphology in UW 88-886 (left), *P. angusticeps* males (CO 100, center), and *P. izodi* males (TP 89-11-1, right). Credit: Wits University

"If you placed a number of *P. angusticeps* specimens into a modern osteology collection, I don't think you'd be able pick them out as any different from those of modern baboons from East and South Africa," says Gilbert.

Furthermore, the estimated age of the specimen from Malapa, ~2.026-2.36 Ma, is in almost perfect agreement with molecular clock analyses for the initial appearance of modern baboons. Thus, the specimen at Malapa may help to solve the evolutionary origins of these highly successful animals and confirm the estimates of molecular studies. In addition, because monkeys are
widely recognised as key time-sensitive elements in the fossil record, the fact that the Malapa *P. angusticeps* specimen is well-dated allows future studies to better estimate the age of fossil sites where the species is found. South African early hominin sites, in particular, may be able to achieve more accurate age estimates on the basis of these new findings.

**More information:** This study is published in an article titled: Papio Cranium from the Hominin-Bearing Site of Malapa: Implications for the Evolution of Modern Baboon Cranial Morphology and South African Plio-Pleistocene Biochronology in the journal, *PLOS ONE*, on 19 August 2015.

Provided by Wits University
Eliminate tuition for students choosing to be rural doctors, UNMC team proposes

University of Nebraska Medical Center leaders are proposing a new way of funding medical education to meet the needs of a nationwide physician shortage.

In a report to be published next month in the journal Academic Medicine, UNMC Chancellor Dr. Jeffrey Gold, College of Medicine Associate Dean Dr. Kelly Caverzagie and City University of New York School of Public Health associate professor Jim Stimpson propose eliminating tuition for some students who choose to practice medicine in underserved areas. Stimpson is a former UNMC health policy expert.

According to the team, billions in state and federal funds appropriated to graduate medical education have produced mixed results since the program's inception with Medicare and Medicaid in 1965.

They say the four-year cost of getting a medical degree is more than $226,000, and the potentially crushing debt burden affects the choice of specialty and where medical school graduates will practice.

The uncertainty of medical education funding leads to "inadequate access to medical services" for many Americans, especially rural citizens, in a time when the population is growing, aging and diversifying, the report says.

"The current system is not the best system with which to fund GME (graduate medical education)," Caverzagie said in a news release. "Rather than the federal and state governments paying all the costs to train a resident, we believe that everyone who benefits from the health care delivery system should contribute to the cost of training residents since everyone benefits from a well-trained physician."

The UNMC team proposes creating a Medical Education Workforce trust fund sustained by a small surcharge paid by all patients to health care workers.

"(W)e propose the establishment of a novel all-payer system whereby government,
commercial and private entities, as well as self-pay individuals, invest in the education of all physicians in exchange for the highest quality of health care," the report says.

Under the proposal, Caverzagie said tuition would be waived for certain students entering medical school who choose to practice medicine in an area of need.

"When they graduate from medical school, they would have no monetary debt, but would be required to provide service in a place of need, whether that would be in a rural or urban underserved area," Caverzagie said.

Gold said UNMC hoped to start the dialogue to make positive changes in the way medical education is paid for in the U.S.

"We hope that by publishing this manuscript we engage policymakers, legislators, as well as leadership in medicine, in a conversation that leads to further ideas and hopefully some pilot programs to develop partnerships on how we might reframe medical school funding and residency funding," he said in a statement.
Mexican Worker in Trump Hotel Criticizes Donald Trump’s Views, on Video

By LIZ ROBBINS AUG. 19, 2015

Ricardo Aca knew he could be fired. But he wanted the camera to roll anyway.

Mr. Aca is shown holding his cellphone watching Donald J. Trump call Mexicans who enter the United States rapists, criminals and drug dealers. Then, Mr. Aca calmly tells his story.

A slight 24-year-old Mexican immigrant who graduated from high school and community college in Queens, Mr. Aca works at the Koi SoHo restaurant, which leases space inside the Trump SoHo hotel. He made a short video with a filmmaker friend and posted it on Facebook on Monday, where it attracted more than 300,000 views in 24 hours.

“I was offended because this is not who we are, this is not who I am, this is not anybody I know who is an immigrant,” Mr. Aca said in an interview on Tuesday, wearing his Mexican national team soccer jersey.

Amid the uproar over immigration in the presidential race — marked by Mr. Trump’s inflammatory comments about Mexicans and his plan to build a wall along the border and deport the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country — the video ignited another debate over what it means to be legal in the United States.

“I know I could lose my job for just talking about Trump,” Mr. Aca says in the video, “but it doesn’t make me proud every day to go to work under his name.”
He described himself as an undocumented immigrant who came here at age 14. But in the video he did not say that he has documents that enable him to remain in the country legally. He was part of a wave of immigrants who came to the United States as children who have been granted deportation deferrals and work permits under a 2012 program.

With this legal permit, Mr. Aca has worked as a busboy for two years for the restaurant, which is not owned or operated by the Trump Organization.

In a brief interview in response to Mr. Aca’s video, Mr. Trump, whose immigration stance has helped vault him to the lead among Republican candidates, said: “He’s got a legal work permit. I’ve heard he does a good job. We thought he was an illegal immigrant at first.”

But while Mr. Trump was quick to point out that his companies employ only people with legal work papers, his immigration policy is far less flexible in its definition of legal status. In announcing his immigration plan in a blueprint and in various interviews, he said he opposed the plan that allowed Mr. Aca to stay in the country and work.

For now, Mr. Trump said he would not press Mr. Aca’s employer to punish him, though he added, “I want to check his file.”

Mr. Aca came to New York from Puebla, Mexico, with his 12-year-old sister. His mother had sought legal avenues for the family to enter the United States, applying for visas, he said, but was unsuccessful. She wound up in New York, getting a job sewing in a factory, and in 2005 arranged for her children to cross the border in Arizona.

As a teenager in Bushwick, Brooklyn, Mr. Aca steadily learned English from listening to Britney Spears songs. He graduated from Grover Cleveland High School in Ridgewood, Queens, and received an associate’s degree in photography at LaGuardia Community College.

He works as an assistant in the photography lab there and splits his time working at a Williamsburg sushi restaurant, Cherry Izakaya, as a runner, and at Koi SoHo. In the video, he said he wanted his three jobs to dispel stereotypes that Mexicans are
lazy.

Asked why he defined himself as undocumented in the video, Mr. Aca explained his legal uncertainty.

"I'm in the deferred action program, which I have to renew every two years," he said. "I consider myself an undocumented immigrant still because it could just be taken away from me at any time."

On Tuesday, the Koi restaurant group demanded that the filmmaker, Chase Whiteside, take down the video, claiming that Mr. Aca had made false and defamatory statements. The video, titled "Meet Ricardo, an undocumented immigrant who works in a Trump Hotel," was misleading, said Suzanne Chou, a lawyer for Koi Group, because it implied Mr. Aca was working illegally — for a Trump hotel. Koi SoHo, she said, is a "third-party tenant" in the hotel.

"Our company follows the law, and if you are eligible to work at Koi, you can apply," Ms. Chou said.

But David W. Leopold, a former president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, volunteered on Mr. Whiteside's behalf to write a letter to the restaurant group in response. He argued that while Mr. Aca was authorized to work, he was still undocumented. He cited information on the website of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services stating that "deferred action does not confer lawful status upon an individual."

On Monday, shortly after the video was posted, the Koi payroll department called Mr. Aca to bring the renewal of his work permit that he said he had forgotten to submit in December. When he walked into the kitchen, he said that line cooks from Mexico and sushi chefs from Japan told him they were proud of him.

"It's important to stand up for what I believe in and to be able to defend myself," Mr. Aca said. "If I do work at Trump SoHo, I have the platform to send this message."

**Correction: August 19, 2015**

An earlier version of this article misidentified the high school Ricardo Aca attended. He graduated from Grover Cleveland High School, not Ridgewood High School.
Mexican immigrant who works in Donald Trump building calls out candidate in video

Published August 19, 2015 | Fox News Latino

Ricardo Aca is getting a lot of attention after sharing a video calling out presidential candidate Donald Trump over his comments about Mexico and immigrants.

Aca, a 24-year-old Mexican immigrant living in New York, wanted to speak out against Trump – even though he believes it might get him fired from his job at Koi SoHo restaurant, which leases space inside the Trump SoHo hotel.

In the video, Aca is shown holding his cellphone, watching Trump call Mexicans who arrive in the U.S. rapists, criminals and drug dealers during his presidential campaign launch in June.

"I know I could lose my job for just talking about Trump," he said in the video, "but it doesn't make me proud every day to go to work under his name."

Aca, who arrived in New York from Puebla, Mexico, at 14 and describes himself as an undocumented immigrant, told the New York Times, "I was offended [by Trump's words] because this is not who we are, this is not who I am, this is not anybody I know who is an immigrant."

In the video, Aca talks about living in Brooklyn with his family.

"This is where I went to school. This is where all my friends are. It's home to me," he said, adding that his family came to the U.S. hoping to find a better life.

Aca was part of a wave of immigrants who were granted deportation protection and work permits under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program in 2012.

He has since received an associate's degree in photography from LaGuardia Community College, and works as an assistant in a photo lab in addition to his job at Koi and another restaurant in Brooklyn.

"I think Republicans think that Mexicans are lazy, but I personally have two jobs. My step-father works two jobs," Aca said in the video. "Everything that my family has we have earned by working hard."

In response to the video, Trump told the Times: "He's got a legal work permit. I've heard he does a good job. We though he was an illegal immigrant at first."

The GOP candidate was also quick to say that his companies employ only people with proper documentation, and that he would not press Aca's employer to punish him.

However, he added, "I want to check his file."

According to the Times, Koi has demanded that the filmmaker Chase Whiteside take the video off YouTube, claiming its title — "Meet Ricardo, an undocumented immigrant who works in a Trump Hotel" — is misleading.

Suzanna Chou, a lawyer for the Koi Group, told the Times that Aca's statements were also false and defamatory and that they implied that he was working illegally for a Trump hotel.

She said that Koi SoHo is a "third-party tenant."
"Our company follows the law and if you are eligible to work at Koi, you can apply," Chou added.

Aca told the Times that shortly after the video was posted, the restaurant's payroll department called and asked him to bring the renewal of his work permit that he had forgotten to submit in December. He also said that when he walked into the kitchen, the line cooks from Mexico and the sushi chefs from Japan told him they were proud of what he had done.

"It's important to stand up for what I believe in and to be able to defend myself," he added. "I do work at Trump SoHo. I have the platform to send this message."

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New IT lab aims to help small businesses

August 19, 2015

A new IT innovation lab designed to help small business owners has officially opened in the Bronx.

The IT Innovation Lab at CUNY on the Concourse held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday to open the lab, which has been a year in the making.

The idea behind the lab is to recruit raw IT talent in the Bronx who can partner with small businesses in the community.

The founders of the innovation lab say that their goal is to create a tech hub that can rival those that have populated parts of Brooklyn and Manhattan.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony was the official opening of the lab, but it has actually been used as part of a pilot program over the course of the summer. That program was only open to Lehman College students, but there are plans to expand it to anyone looking to break into the IT field.
Stop Universities From Hoarding Money

BY VICTOR FLEISCHER  AUG. 19, 2015

SAN DIEGO — WHO do you think received more cash from Yale’s endowment last year: Yale students, or the private equity fund managers hired to invest the university’s money?

It’s not even close.

Last year, Yale paid about $480 million to private equity fund managers as compensation — about $137 million in annual management fees, and another $343 million in performance fees, also known as carried interest — to manage about $8 billion, one-third of Yale’s endowment.

In contrast, of the $1 billion the endowment contributed to the university’s operating budget, only $170 million was earmarked for tuition assistance, fellowships and prizes. Private equity fund managers also received more than students at four other endowments I researched: Harvard, the University of Texas, Stanford and Princeton.

Endowments are exempt from corporate income tax because universities support the advancement and dissemination of knowledge. But instead of holding down tuition or expanding faculty research, endowments are hoarding money. Private foundations are required to spend at least 5 percent of assets each year. Similarly, we should require universities to spend at least 8 percent of their endowments each year.

University endowments have surged in recent years as markets recovered from the financial crisis. Yale’s endowment now tops $24 billion, up 50 percent from 2009.
Income inequality has left elite endowments heaving with cash. Following the tradition of Gilded Age philanthropists like Rockefeller, Carnegie and Vanderbilt, financiers are steering large charitable gifts to elite universities.

Kenneth C. Griffin, a hedge fund manager, gave Harvard $150 million in 2014. In May of this year, Stephen A. Schwarzman, the chairman and co-founder of the private equity giant Blackstone, pledged $150 million to Yale toward a new student center. John A. Paulson, another hedge fund manager, topped them both when he gave Harvard $400 million in June.

While nobody has suggested that quid pro quos were involved in these cases, these gifts highlight the symbiotic relationship between university endowments and the world of hedge funds and private equity funds.

Investors compensate fund managers through an arrangement known as "2 and 20," referring to a 2 percent annual management fee and a 20 percent share of the investment profits, or carried interest.

The arrangement is doubly beneficial, from a tax perspective: Many institutional investors, including universities, are tax-exempt, and fund managers' carried interest is taxed at lower capital gains rates instead of ordinary income rates.

Universities won't disclose the amount of carried interest paid to fund managers. But one can estimate the amount by hand-collecting data from annual reports, financial statements and tax forms, as I did for the Yale figures above.

Despite the success of its endowment, in 2014 Yale charged its students $291 million, net of scholarships, for tuition, room and board.

In 2012, Harvard spent about $242 million from its endowment on tuition assistance; in 2014, it paid $362 million in private-equity fees, and nearly $1 billion in total investment management fees.

Smaller institutions aren't any better. The University of San Diego, where I teach, spent about $2 million from the endowment on tuition assistance in 2012, compared with $5 million in private-equity fees in 2014 and $13 million in overall investment management fees.
Endowment managers argue that premium fees offer premium performance. It's true that, over the past 20 years, under the brilliant guidance of its chief investment officer, David F. Swensen, Yale's private-equity portfolio earned an astounding 36 percent per year. It's also true that Yale's financial aid policy is generous, and that Yale spends money from its endowment on things that benefit students indirectly, like buildings, faculty salaries and research. In the 2014 fiscal year, Yale's endowment provided $830 million for expenses including funding professorships, subsidizing research and maintenance.

But the amount universities pay to private equity reveals the deeper problem: We've lost sight of the idea that students, not fund managers, should be the primary beneficiaries of a university's endowment. The private-equity folks get cash; students take out loans.

As part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act expected later this year, Congress should require universities with endowments in excess of $100 million to spend at least 8 percent of the endowment each year. Universities could avoid this rule by shrinking assets to $99 million, but only by spending the endowment on educational purposes, which is exactly the goal.

Eight percent is not as scary as it might sound. Remember that endowments benefit from new gifts as well as investment returns. The average endowment, small or large, has grown by 9.2 percent per year over the last 20 years, even after accounting for annual spending of about 4 percent. Last year, only 14 of the 447 university endowments with assets over $100 million failed to net at least 8 percent growth.

Under my proposal, endowments would grow, only at a slower pace. They would shrink when markets crash, but recover, and then some, when the market rebounds.

Think about it this way. In 1990, Yale's endowment was worth about $3 billion. If my suggested spending rule had been in place, it would be worth about $10 billion today, instead of $24 billion.

But under my proposal, the sky-high tuition increases would stop, and maybe even reverse themselves. Faculty members would benefit from greater research
support. University libraries, museums, hospitals and laboratories would have better facilities. Donors would see the tangible benefits of philanthropy. Only fund managers would be worse off.

Victor Fleischer is a professor of law at the University of San Diego.

A version of this op-ed appears in print on August 19, 2015, on page A23 of the New York edition with the headline: Stop Colleges From Hoarding Cash.
The Truth and Myth Behind Animal Trials in the Middle Ages

by Eric Grundhauser

Weevils destroy your crops? Pig maim your children? Dying to get back at these creatures? In Europe during the Middle Ages, you could bring them to court, where they could face sentences ranging from gruesome mutilation to excommunication. Or at least that is what many reports say, although the hard evidence of such legal actions is scant.

And somehow, the surreal practice of trying beasts as though they are people continues to this day.

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The main issue with our understanding of the strange practice, according to Sara McDougall, associate professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, is the sourcing. “The sources are 19th-century scholars who didn’t bother to give a whole lot of explicit information on where they found the stuff,” she says. “With a lot of the medieval ones, we know that some of them were either made up or they were textbook cases that were kind of a way to keep students from falling asleep.” In an even stranger reasoning for a fake animal court story, McDougall says that one of the most famous cases of beasts on trial, involving a bunch of rats, was “completely made up just to defame the lawyer who supposedly defended the rats.”

Even with so much uncertainty about which animal trials were real, McDougall stresses that some did still take place.

The most detailed source of case studies (whether real or imagined) we have for the medieval (roughly between the 13th and 16th centuries) practice of putting animals on trial is E.P. Evans’ treatise on the subject, The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals, published in 1906. Evans points out two distinct types of animal trials that would occur:

[There is] a sharp line of technical distinction between Tienerbötchen and Tienerprozesses; the former were capital punishments inflicted by secular tribunals upon pigs, cows, horses, and other domestic animals as a penalty for homicide; the latter were judicial proceedings instituted by ecclesiastical courts against rats, mice, locusts, weevils, and other vermin in order to prevent them from devouring the crops and to expel them from orchards, vineyards, and cultivated fields by means of exorcism and excommunication.

In other words, most large animals were tried for offenses such as murder, and generally executed or exiled, while smaller, more diffuse pests and offenders were more often excommunicated or denounced by a church.
events took tens about 200 cases in which all creatures large and small were brought to trial for a variety of reasons.

Most complaints against smaller animals leveled for infestation or destruction of crops ended up in some sort of excommunication from the church, or official ecclesiastical denouncement. Evans explains that this was largely done as an effort to make people feel better about exterminating them. Since even weevils, slugs, rats, ants, and such were considered God's creatures, the devastation they inflicted was likely part of his plan, so to just destroy them would be to act against God's will and creatures. Of course if they were tried in a church court, and excommunicated (or condemned in the case of animals and insects), that could mitigate guilt.

One such case in the 1480s saw the Cardinal Bishop of Autun in France rule against some slugs that were ruining estate grounds under his purview. He ordered three days of daily processions where the slugs were told to leave the area or be cursed, thus making them free game for extermination. A similar case was said to have taken place just a year later.

In the case of larger animals such as bulls, pigs, dogs, cows, and goats, the offending beasts could, in theory, actually be brought to court to stand trial. The sentences for these animals tended to be more severe.

Pigs often got the worst of the human legal system, for a simple reason. "They were killing people," says McDougall.

In an age where animals were often roaming the streets and children were found in the fields, accidents were pretty common. Evans describes a fairly typical case in 1379 in which two herds of swine were feeding together when a trio of pigs became agitated, and charged the swinemaster's son, who died from his injuries. All of the pigs from both herds were tried, and "after due process of law, were condemned to death." Somewhat luckily, all but the three instigating pigs were implicated as accomplices, and later pardoned.

In most cases, the court endeavored to try the animal as closely as it could to the same way humans were tried. This included how they were punished. Just like some murderers of the day, condemned animals (again, in most cases, pigs), were horribly executed for their crimes. Evans described a pig in 1266 that was publicly burnt for the crime of mutilating a child, and another in 1586 that was "to be mangled and maimed in the head and forelegs, and then to be hanged, for having torn the face and arms of a child."

Beastliness was an occasional accusation that led to the trial of an animal, although this charge was actually known to go in the animal's favor. "Both the human and the animal might be put to death, but in some cases, they seem to have managed to say that it wasn't the animal's fault, that the animal didn't consent," McDougall says. "So the animal wasn't punished."

Still other animals were imprisoned right along with human criminals. In this case, as no one honestly believed the animal was solemnly considering its actions, the owner was charged for the animal's board as a form of secondhand punishment.

As barbaric, strange, or just silly as animal trials may seem, they continue well into the modern day. In 1916 an elephant named Mary murdered her trainer and was hanged in Tennessee using a crane. In 2008, in Macedonia, a bear was convicted of stealing honey from a beekeeper. The parks service was forced to pay $3,500 in damages. It seems like the human thirst for justice, no matter how irrational or silly, continues to know no bounds.
How Greane Tree and Trinity Alliance plan to place low-income workers in high-tech jobs

Aug 20, 2015, 7:05am EDT Updated: Aug 20, 2015, 8:14am EDT

Chelsea Diana
Reporter- Albany Business Review
Email | Twitter

Annamarie Lanesey and Trinity Alliance are developing a coding academy program that could potentially grow Albany, New York's pool of tech talent while training low-income workers for high-tech jobs.

The coding academy would add a new stream of software developers in the area, as many technology companies struggle to find qualified hires. The target students would be people in the region's poorer communities who could not afford or did not have the opportunity to attend a four-year college.

The program would be modeled after a nationwide bootcamp trend, where three months of intensive programming training can take someone's salary from $20,000 to $80,000.

"As someone who works in the software space, we have the same problem as some of the other folks. For all of us, there's a shortage [of developers] here and there's a shortage across the country," Lanesey, the co-founder and president of Greane Tree Technology, said. "I see both the high tech space exploding and the tremendous disparity in our city centers."

Greane Tree designs custom software using Ruby on Rails and other frameworks for clients including the Center for Economic Growth, CUNY, Vicarious Visions and others. The Troy, New York, company works mostly with the programming language Ruby on Rails, which most colleges do not teach making it hard to find qualified developers.

To solve this problem, Greane Tree teamed up with the Trinity Alliance, a nonprofit that serves
poor families and children in Albany, six months ago about building a program. They're working with several nonprofits in the area to find out the best way to reach candidates for the academy.

Now Lanesey wants to hear from more companies on what programming languages businesses in the region use so they have a larger pool of hires to choose from.

"We're just trying to put the pieces in place. What are the programming languages companies use and what exactly do they need?" Lanesey said. "We're looking primarily for companies to connect with us to help us shape what kinds of curriculums we should be trained in."

Lanesey recognized that many of the people coming through the code academies will be entry-level at first, while many of the hard-to-fill jobs require more experience.

"What we are hoping to do through this effort is to build a bigger pipeline," Lanesey said. "Folks who start in entry level positions will eventually over time turn into more experienced senior level developers. We need to get more aggressive at building the full spectrum of the pipeline now, to stop the suffering the entire Albany software sector is feeling."

Lanesey said the coding academy project has been submitted as an idea for the $1.5 billion state money competition. The group putting together proposals to win a portion of that money is requesting project ideas from the community, which can be submitted here.

Chelsea covers technology and money
Astronomer Celebrates Female Scientists’ “Special Natural Gift for Caring and Educating”

By Jennifer Golbeck

At the closing ceremony of last week’s general assembly in Honolulu, the International Astronomical Union (you know, the people who demoted Pluto to dwarf planet status) announced three new female members to its board, in a series of long, somewhat boring speeches.
But when the new general secretary, Piero Benvenuti, spoke, many perked up, although not for the reasons he intended.

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Benvenuti began by celebrating the fact that three of the four incoming board members were women. This is indeed something to celebrate in a field dominated by men. It was his next comment that garnered a reaction. According to a transcript, he said:

I believe a woman scientist is not just another scientist. Women have a special natural gift for caring and educating—and I underline the [etymology] of the word: e-duco, I pull out the best of someone—therefore a woman who is also an astronomer can have a greater impact on the society than a simple scientist.

At the moment those words left his mouth, I witnessed a small explosion on Twitter.

Nicole Gugliucci
@NoisyAstronomer

"@SciBry: .@IAU_org President closes IAU2015 by praising women for being "nurturing and caring". twitter.com/rhaegal/status..." NOOOOOOOOO
9:04 AM - 15 Aug 2015
8 3

Emily Rice
@emilyurice

Oh, FFS. twitter.com/rhaegal/status...
11:08 AM - 15 Aug 2015

I’m a computer scientist, not an astronomer, but the sexual stereotyping of female scientists resonated with me and should be something that’s in the forefront of all scientists’ minds right now. Social media has seen hashtag-based backlash to Tim Hunt's comments about "girls in the lab" and demonstrations that women actually can look like engineers.
"When he said that women’s innate nurturing abilities made them good for work in outreach and development projects, and I felt like we had lurched back to the ’50s," said David L. Clements, an astrophysics at Imperial College London, who attended the speech.

Furthermore, many women have no interest in being nurturing and resent the implication that they are, simply by nature of their gender. Even those who are nurturing don’t necessarily want it considered as part of their suitability as scientists.

Rachael Livermore, a postdoctoral fellow in astronomy at the University of Texas at Austin, also attended the IAU speech and was outraged. "It completely misses the point that we should be striving for equality because excluding huge swaths of people for arbitrary reasons is bad for science as well as being unfair to those excluded," she said, "not because the excluded groups have some sort of special magical skill to offer."

That really is the core of the problem. Benvenuti, by all accounts, sincerely supports the inclusion of more women in the field and in these leadership positions. Even the most critical attendees I spoke with believed he was trying to compliment his colleagues whom he held in high scientific esteem.

But women aren’t superhero scientists. We’re just scientists. Benvenuti was trying to be supportive, but when stereotypes enter the discussion to justify why women—or other underrepresented groups—should be fairly represented in science, it undermines the premise that we should be included simply for our scientific abilities.

"I am willing to give my colleague the benefit of the doubt and assume he didn’t mean any harm by his comments," Emily Rice, an astronomer at the College of Staten Island–CUNY, told me. "Unfortunately, even well-intentioned comments are representative of the benevolent sexism that many women face every day in science. We should be valued as scientists, for our research and other contributions to the field, not by how well we conform to gender stereotypes."

And the benevolence is a tricky part of this. It can feel bad to criticize someone for celebrating diversity because he did it in the wrong way (not to mention that such criticism can spark the hated and dismissive response that we’re being oversensitive). At the same time, it feels worse to hear statements that imply that in order to receive equal treatment, we are expected to have "greater impact on the society than a simple
scientist." Being equivalent to a white male "simple scientist" should be enough.

Thankfully, Berendt has heard the criticism. He posted a statement on his blog Wednesday that heralded his new female colleagues for their scientific achievements and acknowledged the critiques of his comments.

While we hardly need another incident to focus our discussion on sexism in the sciences, it's only by calling out these statements—even those made with good intentions—that we can begin to rid ourselves of the limiting, stereotypical expectations that hinder the progress of diversity.
City's First Lady Chirlane McCray outlines mental health battle plan

By Paula Katinas
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

New York City's First Lady Chirlane McCray on Tuesday offered a progress report on her ambitious effort to get the city to tackle mental illness in a different way, telling reporters that government can no longer ignore "the elephant in the room."

McCray, who has made mental health the hallmark of her public role as Mayor Bill de Blasio's wife, told a group of journalists at a reporter's roundtable at Gracie Mansion that she is in the process of assembling a roadmap that will lead to a guide to how mental illness will be treated in the city.

The statistics are sobering, according to McCray, who said studies have shown that one out of every four or five adult New Yorkers has some type of mental health condition.

Eight percent of high school students have attempted suicide. Another shocking fact discussed Tuesday is that depression, not grades, is the factor determining how long it will take a City University of New York (CUNY) student to graduate.

Mentally ill homeless people are often on a merry-go-round of going from a shelter to a jail to a hospital and back out to a shelter again.

"It's time for us to do something," McCray said. Right now, the city is spending so much money "to put a band-aid" over the problem when a more comprehensive approach would work much better, she said.

McCray has been visiting schools, community centers and other programs and has been seeking input from medical professionals, civic leaders and clergy members to gather feedback "from the ground." She plans to use the information they provide to help form her plan of action.

In March, McCray visited the Veteran Administration's New York Harbor Healthcare System in Bay Ridge to look at a program that treats military veterans with mental health issues.

McCray said her roadmap will contain four components:

1. It will quantify the problem of mental health to give a clearer picture of just how widespread it is.
2. McCray will lay out what she called "a bold vision" of how mental illness will be treated.
3. Programs the city already has in place will be documented.
4. A multi-year agenda for dealing with mental health will be introduced.

Important steps are being taken already, according to McCray.

For example, McCray noted that the city's budget for Fiscal Year 2016 contains $58 million for the treatment of mental...
health problems.

In July, McCray and her husband announced that the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City and the Corporation for National and Community Service would start a $50 million public-private partnership to advance the goal of changing the delivery of mental health services.

The funds will be used to get a new program called Connections to Care off the ground. Under the program, the Center for Economic Opportunity and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will help integrate mental health services into existing programs that are already serving low-income communities.

The city is seeking community-based organizations to take part in the Connections to Care program, according to McCray, who said a Request for Proposals (RFP) will be issued in the fall.

On Aug. 6, de Blasio announced the launch of NYC Safe, a program to support what he termed the “narrow population of New Yorkers” with untreated serious mental illness who pose a concern for violent behavior.

NYC Safe, which went into effect immediately, established a centralized oversight body that coordinates public safety and public health. Under the program, the city can respond more rapidly to prevent violence and act more assertively when it does happen, according to the mayor.

McCray, who said that the majority of mentally ill people are not violent, added that part of the goal of her roadmap will be to train people on how to recognize the symptoms of mental illness and then give them a roadmap on where to get help for themselves or a friend or loved one.

Under her vision, people would have a “mental health tool kit” to draw upon when they need help coping, she said.

Another goal is to get rid of the stigma surrounding mental illness. “People don’t want to go to a place where they are going to be labeled,” she said.

Getting help to children is a key, according to McCray, who said the presence of a clinic in a school “changes everything.”

Senior centers and job placement centers are other places where staff could possibly be trained to recognize mental health issues, she said.

“The best thing we can do is act early,” McCray said.

McCray has seen mental health issues close up. She candidly told reporters that both of her parents suffered from depression and that a friend she had gone to high school with committed suicide at age 26. The pain of that loss is something that she has carried with her “all these years,” she said.

Her daughter, Chiara de Blasio, was diagnosed with anxiety and depression, McCray said. She described her daughter’s problems as “a tipping point” that made her want to look deeply into the issue of mental health.

When she started to become involved, she was surprised. “I had no idea that it was so huge” and that “it wasn’t just my family,” she said.
Eight Sisters of Life professed final vows at A Mass celebrated by Cardinal Dolan Aug. 6 at the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in Stamford, Conn.

The Sisters are:

Sister Thérèse Marie, S.V., 36, a native of Commack, graduated from SUNY Maritime College with a bachelor’s degree in business marine transportation and business administration. Before entering the Sisters of Life in 2005, she was a volunteer coordinator and pregnancy consultant at the Life Center of Long Island. She serves at the Co-Workers of Life Mission in Manhattan, coordinating the efforts of key people who join the Sisters of Life in their outreach to pregnant women. She is the fourth of five children of Michael Saglimbeni and Virginia Corbett.

Sister Flat Marie, S.V., 36, a native of Onsted, Mich., graduated from the Franciscan University of Steubenville with bachelor’s degrees in humanities and Catholic culture and theology. Before entering the Sisters of Life in 2005, she was working for Generation Life in charity and pro-life education. She serves at Sacred Heart of Jesus Convent in Manhattan, where pregnant women, vulnerable to abortion, live side-by-side with Sisters. She is the youngest of five children of Barclay and Kathleen Hayes.

Sister Bernadette Thérèse, S.V., 36, a native of Sherrard, Ill., she graduated from Monmouth College with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Before entering the Sisters of Life in 2007, she taught at a Catholic school. She serves at Villa Maria Guadalupe, a retreat center in Stamford, Conn., owned by the Knights of Columbus and operated by the Sisters of Life. She is the eldest of three children of John and LuAnn Swan.

Sister Maria Anne Michela, S.V., 34, a native of Carmel, Ind., graduated from Indiana University with a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry and from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a master’s in biomolecular chemistry. She entered the Sisters of Life in 2007. She serves at Visitation Mission in Manhattan, assisting women in crisis pregnancies. She is the daughter of John and Eileen Takach and has one brother.

Sister Hosanna Immaculata, S.V., 34, a native of Brooklyn, graduated from SUNY Stony Brook with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and sociology and from CUNY Kingsborough with a nursing degree. Before entering the Sisters of Life in 2007, she was working as a nursing assistant at a nursing home and assisting at a rectory. She serves in the Visitation Mission in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, assisting women with crisis pregnancies. She is the third of four children of
Sister Amara Fillas, S.V., 39, a native of Sealy, Texas, graduated from Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in marketing. Before entering the Sisters of Life in 2007, she was working as the business manager for the Coalition for Life, a pro-life organization in College Station, Texas. She serves in the Visitation Mission in Manhattan, assisting women in crisis pregnancies. She is the daughter of Melvin and Beverly Dierschke and has one sister.

Sister Marie Agnus Dei, S.V., 31, a native of East Wilton, Me., graduated from The Catholic University of America with a bachelor's degree in nursing. Before entering the Sisters of Life in 2007, she was working as a nurse in the intensive care unit of a hospital in Silver Spring, Md. She serves at Visitation Mission in Manhattan, assisting women in crisis pregnancies. She is the daughter of the late Dr. William Yates, and his wife, Margaret Yates. She is the seventh of eight children, including Sister Mary Louise Concepta, S.V.

Sister Bethany Medonna, S.V., 30, a native of Melbourne, Fla., graduated from the University of Central Florida with a bachelor's degree in interpersonal communication. Before entering the Sisters of Life in 2007, she was working in the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Orlando, Fla. She serves as an assistant to the novice director of the Sisters of Life, helping to form young Sisters in religious life. She is the second of three children of Bill and Rita Burwell.
BDS: The Legal Fights To Come

Wed, 08/19/2015
Jerome A. Chanes
Special To The Jewish Week

Everyone, it seems, is in the BDS game these days: Sheldon Adelson, the Presbyterian Church, American universities and their students, national Jewish groups — and, not least, Congress and state legislatures.

The hot spot of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, of course, is the college campus. BDS has been with us a quarter-century and more, so why the sudden explosion of activism, especially on campuses?

The issue has become a worldwide one, with calls from many quarters to “punish” Israel for its alleged misdeeds by boycotting Israeli products and academics, divesting investments and applying a range of sanctions. BDS became a popular technique early in the second intifada, with pro-Palestinian activists musing, “Hey, it worked with apartheid; maybe it will work with Israel!” Academic sanctions against Israel, especially in the U.K., became commonplace. And in America, where a number of mainline Protestant churches have had boycott and divestment on their agendas since the 1980s, there has been in recent years an uptick in activity.

But the main battleground, in 2015, for BDS has been the campus. For one thing, the campus is the most sensitive, and the most visible, of the BDS arenas. For another, the campus is blessed with the burdens of freedom of expression — whatever that means.

One reason for what’s different in 2015 is that there is a right-wing Likud government in Israel, one that is tailor-made to exacerbate an already hot situation. Closer to home is the emergence on campuses of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), which has become a vocal, well-organized, highly effective group on many campuses. SJP has focused much of its activity on attracting uninvolved students to BDS activism. The Anti-Defamation League reports that there are only 29 campuses on which there are unusually active SJP groups, but the number is growing. Almost every campus has some sort of BDS activity.

Yet at the same time, in terms of the impact of BDS activity, anti-Israel activity and anti-Semitism — always a complicated relationship — the overwhelming majority of Jewish students on campus feel, and indeed are, secure. It’s important to note that, with all the BDS activity and activism, not one university has adopted a divestment policy. The pattern was established early on, when, in 2002, then-Harvard University President Lawrence Summers was faced with a serious divestment threat by faculty; he said in effect, “Not on my watch!” and declared that BDS is “anti-Semitic in effect if not intent.”

Summers was delivering an important message: Not all BDS activists are anti-Semitic; some may be — but even those who are not are creating a campus
climate that may be conducive to anti-Semitism.

This dynamic, of course, suggests the question of the fine line between “anti-Israel” — that is, legitimate criticism of the government of Israel — and “anti-Semitic.” This threshold question is obviously subjective; some have a very low threshold: any criticism of Israel is anti-Semitism, or at least motivated by hatred of Jews. For others, anything goes.

My sense is that criticism of the policies of the government of the State of Israel — indeed, harsh criticism — is entirely legitimate. (The discussion within Israel, on a range of policies, is sharp and tough.) The point at which criticism of Israel shades into anti-Semitism is when the legitimacy of Israel, of the Zionist enterprise, is questioned.

One approach to fighting BDS, advocated especially by those who dramatically overstate the problem, is through anti-BDS legislation, and there is a momentum building in that direction.

Such legislation is a complicated matter, and falls into two categories. An example on the federal level was a provision in the 2013 trade bill, which provided that, in negotiations on trade with European Union countries, the EU resist boycotts of Israel. Legislation in the states is varied. An Illinois bill, for example, would prohibit investing pension funds in companies that boycott Israel. Other bills would cut off funding to schools that engage in academic boycotts. National Jewish groups, faced with the question of schools losing their funding if they engage in criticism of Israel, have mostly stayed out of this fray.

The larger legal question on campus, yet to be addressed, is whether BDS will create an environment hostile to Jews. This is a federal Title VI question. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in federally funded institutions, and almost every university in the land falls under this rubric. Legal analysts predict that there will be a spate of Title VI lawsuits. The hostile-environment issue is the one to watch; the Jewish community’s traditional commitment to freedom of expression will be under challenge.

What ought be done on campus? Most analysts suggest that education is the key, especially education that makes the case that Israel is not an apartheid state. Also important is strengthening the traditional alliances and coalitions in opposition to BDS and other anti-Israel activism.

At bottom, there are many voices in the Jewish community that suggest that it is not BDS that threatens Israel; it is Israeli policies (or lack thereof) in the West Bank that enable those who advocate BDS to have a life.

In the words of a senior Jewish communal professional, “It would be nice if Israel were to do a few things.”

Jerome Chanes, a regular contributor, is the author of four books on Jewish public affairs and history. He is a fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies of the CUNY Graduate Center and teaches in the City University system.
Members Only: Media Forced to Be—Gasp!—Useful to the Communities They Serve

How shriveling ad dollars will pressure media brands to find ways to do more than sermonize

By Jeff Jarvis 08/19/15 10:30am

A man holds a tablet and a smartphone showing a news website and a Twitter news thread in front of world newspapers on September 12, 2013 in Paris. (Photo: LIONEL BONAVENTURE/AFP/Getty Images)

In media, "membership" is still just another word for "subscription." Or in some cases, "tote bag." For public broadcasters and now some newspapers and other media, "membership" still means, "we want your money."

But the idea of membership in communities of shared interest holds tremendous potential for changing news organizations—not just to earn them new revenue but also to reset their relationship with the people they serve. To do that, we in media must rethink what it
means to belong to a community as well as the ways people can contribute value as members and the rewards they receive for membership.

Public media, of course, have long offered membership as a means to support their good work. Only high single-digit percentages of their audiences act as patrons, making up for the rest of us freeloaders. The Wall Street Journal has started promoting membership as a way to give readers access to events and discounts—and, not surprisingly, tee times. The Guardian—which unlike the Journal and The New York Times does not earn revenue in exchange for access to its content—has launched a membership campaign focused mainly on giving loyal Guardianistas access to an ambitious calendar of events at a new facility in London. (Disclosure: I consult with the Guardian.)

That's a start. But the few membership strategies I could find are still focused on media and their needs rather than on the public and its loyalties.

So let's begin a reconsideration of membership there: with new tribes. One might well feel an affinity and want to belong to a club called the Guardian or, yes, Fox News, because of their mission and culture. But would you really feel a sense of belonging with a club—a mass—called Time magazine or WABC or the Cincinnati Enquirer? Not so much.

You might however want to join a community of Cincinnati moms, business owners, retirees, civic activists, foodies, Bengals fans, teachers, runners, cancer survivors, gardeners, job seekers, jazz fans, or pug owners. The opportunities are endless.

To serve these communities, the institutions formerly known as newspapers,

If we reconsider the notion of membership fully, then media institutions will see themselves not as factories churning out a product called
magazines, and broadcasters can no longer rely on their old, one-size-fits-all product called content. They must build new, more targeted and relevant services and applications for many communities and many use cases for news.

In the process, they will gather data about people as individuals—just as Facebook and Google do—and thus be able both to deliver and extract greater value: When you join the Cincinnati Mom’s Club, we know you’re a mom and can give you more relevant and useful content and service and, yes, better targeted and more profitable advertising. To accomplish that, media organizations old and new must change not only their products but also their organizations and business models. If they succeed, though, they can earn greater attention, engagement, loyalty, and revenue—from higher-value advertising and often directly from members.

Next, they need to look at new ways that members can contribute value, other than obviously cash. Melody Kramer, a daring public media innovator who recently left NPR, suggests many alternatives in a report for the Nieman Foundation. Members can give media institutions tremendous volunteer effort: gathering content, leading discussions, playing host to events, donating design or creative work, testing websites, fact-checking, suggesting stories. They can contribute expertise, endorsement, and marketing (mentions on social media or recruitment of more members). If they are truly members and not merely audience or customers, they will want to contribute to the good of the community.

Finally, media organizations need to consider new currencies for reward besides just access to content (which is to say: pay walls). Members may want social status (why else do we carry around those silly tote bags?); access to journalists for events and conversation; access to decision making (are we ready to share some of that power, as European football teams
and entrepreneurs on Kickstarter do?); and, yes, good discounts and maybe even tee times.

If we reconsider the notion of membership fully, then media institutions will see themselves not as factories churning out a product called content and not as lecturers telling the public what we think they need to know. Instead, we will see ourselves as members of those very communities, serving our fellow members. That is the real opportunity membership affords.

To explore these ideas and more, the center I head at CUNY’s Graduate School of Journalism is holding a summit on membership on August 26. We will hear from Melody Kramer and other innovators, look at tools for enabling membership, learn about other perspectives on membership from other industries (airlines, stores, houses of worship, sports teams, campaigns), and—most importantly—look at how membership can teach us in media how to better serve our communities.
High school students hoping to earn their certified nursing assistant license practice skills they will need to pass the state exam during a 10-week course at Hostos Community College in the Bronx. Photo by Meredith Kolodner/Hechinger Report.

Mercedez Vargas really wanted to get her high school diploma, but she struggled to get passing grades at a last-chance night school in the Bronx just as she had in the daytime at Marie Curie High School.
A college degree? That seemed an unattainable fantasy.

She was ready to give up when a staff member from a nearby nursing home, of all places, came and spoke to Vargas and her classmates. He offered to help them finish while they worked in paid internships and got training to become home health aides, which are in critically short supply.

The program gave her new direction.

"As I started interacting with the elderly, I actually found it was something I would like," said Vargas, who is 20. "Now I actually love it."

Meanwhile, an academic mentor assigned by the nursing home, Molly O’Brien, stepped in to prod Vargas through an online program that finally got her a diploma.

"Molly helped me finish school," she said, tears filling her eyes.

And the $15 an hour she’s now making at the nursing home gives her hope she might achieve the next step: getting to and through college.

This isn’t simple altruism. It’s a manifestly practical arrangement.

The geriatric health care company, Jewish Home Lifecare, needs a pipeline of workers for itself. And showing them a route to these well-paying jobs has proven to focus drifting students on getting the college degrees they need to get there — even as policymakers and educators themselves struggle in vain to raise enrollment and graduation rates.

**Related: Vocational degrees that pay off**

The Geriatric Career Development program provides academic counseling and paid training and internships that lead to health-care certifications. Students can then land good jobs that make it easier to work their way through college than they could at the minimum wage.

Three of the top six occupations projected to add the most jobs in the next decade are in
health care — registered nurses, home health aides and nursing assistants — so health care providers in many parts of the country are developing programs like these to attract more employees.

But the Bronx-based Jewish Home approach is unusual, dedicated not only to creating that workforce, but also to helping at-risk youth.

Ninety-five percent of the program’s students, most of whom live near or below the poverty line, enroll in college.

The students are recruited when they’re entering their sophomore years at high-poverty public high schools in the Bronx and upper Manhattan. There are no academic requirements, but students have to show enough interest to attend an open house and fill out an application. If they’re accepted, the students are trained to become certified nursing assistants by the time they’re high school seniors.

Jewish Home’s geriatric training program, which is paid for mostly by private sources and with some government funding, offers a career and academic support program that runs after school, during spring and summer breaks, and throughout college. The program costs $1.4 million annually, or an average of $4,500 per student, per year.

Participants come after school for four hours twice a week to get academic, job and college prep, as well as a free meal. Juniors go on college visits and rising seniors take a 10-week summer course aimed at passing the state nursing assistant exam.

While their high schools have an average graduation rate of 61 percent, nearly 100 percent of students in the program graduate.

They also end up in good financial shape to pay for college. Certified nursing assistants in New York State on average earn just over $15 an hour, or about $32,000 a year. About three-
quarters of the students in the program have family incomes below $30,000 a year and about half come from families whose annual income is below $20,000.

Haddy Lemy, 17, who will be a senior at Marie Curie in September and hopes to be an obstetrician one day, plans to apply for college scholarships, “but working as a CNA in college will mean I know I have a source of money coming from somewhere.”

Related: New policies close off opportunities to college applicants in need of extra help

Lemy said the academic help and the prospect of getting that license were the main reasons she signed up for the program, especially since her mother had twice tried to pass the CNA exam and failed, and now works in retail.

“She’s telling everyone, ‘Oh my god, look at her, she’s gonna get it,’” said Lemy, breaking into a big smile.

Since the program started in 2009, its students' pass rate on the CNA exam has climbed to 94 percent.

Most nursing assistant training courses cost about $1,000, plus books and the $115 exam fee. Students in the geriatric care program, by contrast, are paid up to $1,000 for taking part in the 10-week summer program, depending on their attendance and participation. Summer Fridays are spent preparing to write college essays and choose schools, and the fall is fully devoted to filling out college applications.

Registered nurses in New York, the next step up from certified nursing assistants, make more than $36 an hour on average, and more than $77,000 a year. But that requires a college degree. While not all the students in the program make it through college, 80 percent of those who have participated since 2009 have either gotten a degree or are still on track to getting one.

The Jewish Home has fared well, too, in its goal of filling jobs. Of the nursing home program’s 430 graduates, 75 have worked there as certified nursing assistants, and administrators hope that others will return as RNs once they’ve finished college.

But that’s proven to be hard work, thanks to harsh realities about public education in places
like the Bronx. These students often come from high schools where they got good grades for simply showing up and turning in their work on time, said program director Toni Sexton.

Related: From pews to classes, a new push for higher ed in church

“We’ve coined the phrase ‘gentle dream crushing and gentle dream redirection,’ because our students going pre-med is a waste of their financial aid,” said Sexton. “Not because they’re not bright — we have lots of bright, very intelligent young people who are incredibly underprepared, and at this point it’s nearly impossible for them catch up.”

But the program’s principal strategy is to motivate students by giving them a clear career path.

Last year, after Vargas completed the training and got her high school diploma, she was hired as a home health aide. She worked 12-hour shifts, finally becoming able to support herself and move out on her own. She tried to enroll in an emergency medical training course, but didn’t have enough money to cover the tuition deposit.

Her mentor, Molly O’Brien, convinced her to cut back on her work hours and enroll in the nurse assistant course this summer, when she spent from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. in class and then worked evenings and weekends as a home health aide at the Jewish Home. She had to move back to her mother’s two-bedroom apartment with her two younger siblings, but she sees it as temporary.

Vargas is feeling confident about passing the certified nursing exam, program staffers are encouraging her to take the next step toward a degree, and she’s still connected to the mentor who helped her through school the first time and is trying to do it again.

“Every time something happens,” she said, “Molly’s the first person I email.”

*This story was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education. Read more about higher education.*
Union Takes a McDonald's Challenge Overseas

By NOAM SCHEIBER  AUG. 19, 2015

McDonald's long ago went global. Lately, the anti-McDonald's campaign has started following it around the world.

The union-led effort to raise wages and organize workers at fast-food chains in the United States is expanding its focus beyond organized protests at home — its key point of leverage for almost three years — to highlighting McDonald's actions abroad in hopes that foreign regulators will bring further pressure to bear on the company.

The efforts are intended to build on the success of the anti-McDonald's campaign in raising wages for fast-food workers in the United States, particularly in New York State.

But it is also a tacit acknowledgment that the campaign's second major goal, a union for workers at McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants, remains elusive. The activists plan to turn their attention to McDonald's in the overseas markets where its operations have been more lucrative recently as a way of drawing the company to the bargaining table in this country.

Scott Courtney, the Service Employees International Union official who is the architect of the so-called Fight for 15 campaign, laid out the new approach in his first on-the-record interview since he started working on the effort in 2012.

"I see this conversation as a departure point from a campaign that publicly has been seen as strikes and demands around $15 and the union," Mr. Courtney said. "We
intend to lay out what we can, what we know at this point, then embark on taking our
case to other forums over the fall, into next year as we need to.”

To that end, dozens of legislators, union leaders and McDonald’s workers from
around the world have converged this week in Brasília, the capital of Brazil — most of
them at the S.E.I.U.’s expense — to draw attention to their accusations against
McDonald’s.

The events will reach their climax on Thursday, when Mr. Courtney and several
legislators and workers will testify before a committee of the Brazilian Senate. The
witnesses are expected to describe what the campaign says are abusive labor practices
at McDonald’s restaurants around the world, the corporation’s efforts to evade taxes
in Brazil, and tax evasion and anti-competitive practices across Europe.

“In Europe, we have austerity policies,” said Jutta Steinruck, a member of the
European Parliament from Germany who will also be testifying on Thursday. “If we
don’t take in taxes, it’s an issue of social policy. We will not be able to pay subsidies
for poor people, for their health care.”

The escalation of the international side of the campaign comes at a time when
the financial performance of McDonald’s has flagged, particularly in the United
States, where the company acknowledges that business has been in decline for nearly
three years. By contrast, growth in many European countries, particularly Britain, has
been stronger.

The poor performance recently prompted a leadership change at the company,
whose new chief executive, Steve Easterbrook, has begun what he has called a
turnaround plan that would “return critical markets to sustainable growth by
regaining customers’ trust and loyalty.”

Mr. Easterbrook has also vowed to transform McDonald’s into “a modern
progressive burger company.” One of his first major acts as chief executive was to
raise the minimum wage the company pays employees at all of its corporate-owned
stores to one dollar over the locally-mandated minimum wage.

Despite the financial strains and more conciliatory posture from Mr.
Easterbrook, however, most analysts say the odds of a successful unionization effort
at McDonald’s remain daunting. There is little evidence that investors take the threat seriously: There was not a single question about the possibility during the company’s second-quarter conference call with analysts in July, or even about the various regulatory actions unions have helped initiate abroad.

Meanwhile, the company’s on-the-ground defenses against unionization appear next to impregnable.

“Unions have been trying to organize McDonald’s for decades,” said Richard Adams, who worked for McDonald’s for more than 15 years, most recently as director of franchising in the Western United States, and now works as a franchise consultant. “This is nothing new to McDonald’s.”

Mr. Adams explained that even if the company decided to adopt policies that would help workers organize at corporate-owned stores, franchisees would probably simply ignore the efforts. “The company has no authority or power to make those agreements with unions on behalf of franchisees,” he said. “If I was a franchisee, I wouldn’t even read the memos.”

Still, McDonald’s faces some additional challenges on the labor front.

Last week, the National Labor Relations Board rejected an appeal by McDonald’s in a case that will decide whether the company is a joint employer of workers at its franchises. A joint employer determination would make it easier to apply any concession workers wrested from the McDonald’s Corporation to workers at McDonald’s franchises, including, for example, a card-check provision that could bring a union into existence at a store once a majority of workers signed union cards.

“The S.E. I. U. is hoping that if the decision comes out the way they want it to, the overseas efforts will be one more pressure point on McDonald’s to grant some kind of organizing concession,” said Glenn Spencer of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The wage increase at McDonald’s may also do little to appease its employees. A worker at a McDonald’s in Chichester, Pa., said that she and her colleagues had their hours cut sharply after the wage increase went into effect on July 1, with the store’s manager routinely depriving them of two or three hours of work on an eight-hour shift.
The worker, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of being fired, said she had typically worked 65 hours in each two-week pay period before the wage increase. “The last pay period it was 46 hours,” she said. “This pay period it was 43. Per week, that’s 21-22 hours.” (A second person who examined the worker’s recent pay stubs corroborated her account.)

“Like any place of business, employee shifts and hours vary depending on the guest traffic,” said Heidi Barker Sa Shekhem, a McDonald’s spokeswoman. “Our sales information for this location shows traffic was slower in July than in June, which may have impacted some employee shifts and hours.”

While McDonald’s defenses at home remain strong, the labor campaign abroad hopes to weaken the company on other fronts.

The European Commission recently began looking into accusations leveled by a coalition of European and American unions and anti-poverty activists that McDonald’s avoided over 1 billion euros in taxes in Europe between 2009 and 2013 by funneling royalties to a Luxembourg-based subsidiary.

Earlier this week, a Brazilian union filed a complaint with authorities in that country asserting that McDonald’s has gone to elaborate lengths to avoid paying taxes there as well.

At the hearing in Brasilia on Thursday, the anti-McDonald’s campaign will unveil what it says is evidence that the company is engaged in anti-competitive behavior in Europe, where the unions say that McDonald’s uses its market power to compel franchisees to pay far more in rent as a percentage of their sales than its corporate-owned stores pay.

Ms. Barker Sa Shekhem disputed the unions’ calculations. “In all of the markets mentioned — the U.K., France, Spain — our company-owned restaurants actually pay higher rents than franchisees” as a percentage of sales, she said. “We are quite confident in not only the legality, but in the appropriateness of the process.”

But the merit of each complaint may be less important than the overall labor effort to paint McDonald’s as an outlaw corporate citizen. “The approach is to throw everything out there and see what sticks,” said Ruth Milkman, a sociologist who
Professor Milkman pointed to a campaign in Southern California in the early 1990s by immigrant construction workers, with the support of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. "They collected thousands and thousands of documents about overtime laws that had been violated, then basically dropped all those cases in exchange for the union," she said.

In the interview, Mr. Courtney implicitly acknowledged a similar strategy. "McDonald's could either go down this road of having issue after issue raised and public light shined on it, and they're not going to look good," he said. "Or they can say, 'We're going to lead, we're going to turn our reputation around by turning our company's basic business model around.'"
Analysis: At Core, Clinton Prefers Pragmatism Over Passion

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  AUG. 19, 2015, 5:05 P.M. E.D.T.

EDGARTOWN, Mass. — During her failed 2008 White House campaign, Hillary Rodham Clinton derided rival Barack Obama’s lofty talk of hope and change as equivalent to expecting “celestial choirs” to drop from the sky and inspire people to do the right thing.

Obama’s optimism ultimately trumped Clinton’s pragmatism. Now, as she seeks the White House again, Clinton has tried to pull a few pages from Obama’s playbook, looking to make more personal connections with voters and infusing her campaign with reminders that she could make history as the nation’s first female president. Her first TV ads focused on how her mother’s difficult upbringing inspired her to enter public service.

Yet a frank exchange between Clinton and black activists that was made public this week underscores that her core approach to politics remains unchanged. The former senator and secretary of state puts practicality over passion.

"I don’t believe you change hearts," Clinton told leaders from the Black Lives Matter movement. "I believe you change laws, you change allocation of resources, you change the way systems operate."

The exchange also crystalized a persistent concern that some Clinton supporters have about her candidacy. Her advice to the activists could be viewed as level-headed and reasoned, reflecting what supporters see as a solutions-oriented style that is sorely lacking in Washington. But it also highlighted that empathy isn’t her first
instinct and that forging the kind of connections with voters that her campaign insists are important remains a challenge.

As the activists prodded Clinton for a more heartfelt response, she pushed them for a more coherent plan. Her comments were far less biting than when she tangled with Obama in 2008, but her message was essentially the same: Change comes from action, not rhetoric.

"She's terrifically smart," said Stanley Renshon, a political science professor at the City University of New York who has written about the Clintons. "But she operates always at the cognitive level. It's always about figuring things out strategically. She's emotionally tone deaf."

Clinton met privately last week with the activists, who are leaders in an effort spurred by recent high-profile police shootings of black men. A video of the exchange was made public several days later, giving voters a rare glimpse of the hyper-cautious Clinton in an unscripted moment.

"You can keep the movement going, which you have started, and through it you may actually change some hearts," Clinton told the activists. "But if that's all that happens, we'll be back here in 10 years having the same conversation."

The airing of Clinton's comments comes during a vexing summer for her campaign. She remains the clear front-runner for the Democratic nomination, with more money, endorsements and support in public polls than her rivals. But polls also show that she faces questions about her trustworthiness and continues to be dogged by her use of personal email and a private server while she was at the State Department.

Clinton also faces a surge of enthusiasm for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, the self-proclaimed Democratic socialist who is drawing crowds around the country while appealing to Americans' concerns about income inequality. Sanders also has been a target of Black Lives Matter activists, who have interrupted some of his rallies to demand he prioritize policies to address racism.

Clinton's campaign has also had to compete for attention with the surprise summer surge of Donald Trump, whose bid for the Republican nomination has upended the GOP race.
As Clinton knows firsthand, an emotional connection with voters is an intangible that can help propel even the unlikeliest of candidates into the White House. Obama broke through with soaring speeches that blended aspirations for uniting the country with his own unique personal story. Clinton's husband, former President Bill Clinton, oozed empathy with voters in settings both large and small.

Clinton has shown her own flashes of empathy and emotion, most notably when she teared up in New Hampshire days before the state's 2008 Democratic primary, a contest she went on to win. She relishes talking about her young granddaughter.

Still, Clinton prefers building a rapport with voters over their shared views on the economy and other policy issues. She's spent the early months of her 2016 campaign holding small group discussions on small business and education proposals, and recently held an event focused on a growing drug epidemic.

"She's a very pragmatic person," said Bruce Buchanan, a presidential scholar at the University of Texas. "She's not Bill, she's Hillary."